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AUTHOR Cooley, Van E.; Thompson, Jay C., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

The Saturday School Alternative for at-risk students provides educators with a realistic framework, time, and community resources to help resolve almost any student problem encountered. Based on effective schools research, the program is no panacea but a realistic attempt to modify student behavior by providing experiences that will build a positive self-concept. The Saturday Alternative does not attempt to circumvent existing discipline policies or to allow students an unreasonable number of chances. The Saturday School curriculum is an integral model component and can be expanded to address drug abuse education, conflict resolution, study habit development, and other concerns. The intervention program has nine components: (1) diagnosis and assessment of student behavior problems; (2) rigid study environment; (3) reality contact with successful business people; (4) completion of a worksheet; (5) completion of a behavior contract; (6) follow-up counseling; (7) "Operation Success" opportunities; (8) recognition and positive reinforcement; and (9) evaluation and program modification. Inservice education for teachers and for business and community leaders involved in the reality contact phase is essential. Saturday supervisors and counselors must be instructed in desired program procedures and outcomes. Effective parenting classes may also be held regularly. The Saturday Alternative may not be the solution for all school systems; the model does treat the causes of student misbehavior through first creating a data base and then providing students with a support system to monitor and correct problem behavior. A model diagram is appended. (MLH)

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THE SATURDAY ALTERNATIVE - A PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Van E. Cooley
Assistant Superintendent
Westfield Washington Schools
322 West Main Street
Westfield, Indiana 46074

Jay C. Thompson Jr.
Professor of Curriculum
Center for Lifelong Education
Teachers College
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana 47306

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THE SATURDAY ALTERNATIVE - A PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

The Saturday Alternative is a program for students at risk. The program provides educators with a realistic framework, time, and community resources to help resolve almost any student problem that might be encountered. The financial cost of the program is limited and well within the range of most school systems. The Saturday Alternative is based on effective schools research findings and components researchers and practitioners have espoused as being critical to good schools.

Educators must attempt to diagnose the reasons why students experience difficulty in school and attempt to provide remedies or solutions to these problems. Too often in the past the focus has been on the symptoms of student misconduct rather than examining the causes of student misbehavior. Searching for the causes of student misbehavior is time consuming and burdensome. The cost of not modifying student behavior and consequently keeping students in school is simply too great and something schools and communities cannot afford. Due to changes in society and the family unit, students need support and reinforcement that may have not been needed in the past.

The Saturday Alternative is not a panacea but a realistic attempt to modify student behavior. One major goal is to provide students with experiences that will build a positive self-concept. Students take full responsibility for behavior; are given instruction in areas of need; and are provided counseling following the Saturday Alternative. Students are informed of the ramifications of continued misbehavior and provided real-world expectations by business and community leaders. It must be noted the Saturday Alternative is not an attempt to circumvent existing discipline policies or to provide students with an unreasonable number of chances.

The Saturday School curriculum is an integral part of the model and can be expanded to address any problem or concern facing students or the school district. This might mean anything from drug abuse education, to conflict resolution, to instruction pertaining to good study habits.

The Saturday Alternative must be initiated with the realization there are reasons for student misbehavior, and for behavioral modification to occur, a number of steps must be taken. The Saturday Alternative is an

intervention program with the nine basic components (See Figure 1) serving as the foundation. Total implementation of the program will enhance chances for success. These components are listed below.

1. Diagnosis and assessment of student behavioral problems.
2. Rigid Study Environment.
3. Reality Contact - Initiating student contact with successful members of the business and industrial community.
4. Completion of the Saturday School Worksheet.
5. Completion of the Behavioral Contract.
6. Follow-up counseling through a trained contact person or guidance counselor during the week following the Saturday school experience.
7. Operation Success - A coordinated effort by all staff to provide students opportunities for success.
8. Recognition - Positive reinforcement and recognition for holding the behavior contract and modifying behavior.
9. Evaluation and Program Modification.

Step one involves an assessment of student behavior. In order to successfully modify student misbehavior, all facets of behavior must be examined. Discipline referrals, grades, attendance patterns, feedback from the student, teachers, administrators and parents must be collected and analyzed. Standardized testing data and information from local agencies (i.e. law enforcement, welfare, mental health) might also provide clues regarding causation of misbehavior. At first glance this might appear to be a cumbersome procedure, but realistically good teachers and administrators either consciously or subconsciously examine this type of data each day. Documentation and a thorough analysis is of the utmost importance. There is a cost to good discipline: time and effort.

The rigid study environment is the second step and consists of a three hour time period. Two of the three hours are comprised of an intense study period. This timeframe provides supervisors the time to deal with student behavioral problems either individually or in small groups. In too many instances students are ignored or have little positive interaction with an adult role model.

Rules at the Saturday Alternative are simple and must be conveyed to both the parent and student. Students must be on time and admittance will only be allowed if the student brings study materials. Unnecessary interaction, passes to lockers or restrooms are not permitted. Students may

ask Saturday instructors questions concerning lessons; however, students failing to cooperate will be asked to leave and assigned to counseling and another Saturday session scheduled the following week. It is recommended continuous uncooperative behavior be dealt with through another attempt at the Saturday cycle; however, if this fails then suspension and/or expulsion should be exercised. While the Saturday Alternative is a comprehensive effort to keep students in school, it must be recognized that all students can not function in a school environment.

The third component of the Saturday Alternative is reality contact. This consists of presentations by local leaders from business, industry, and other community professionals emphasizing the importance of positive behavior both in school and the marketplace. Presenters should discuss the ramifications of problem behavior and how such behavior is dealt with in the world of work. Realistically, employers are faced with and must deal with many of the behaviors educators face each day. Instead of school suspension or expulsion students often face, workers may be terminated or face a restricted career ladder should problem behavior persist.

Presentations by community representatives may be supported by video taping represented business and industrial facilities, interviews with employees, or presentation of other information pertinent to the organization. Prior to initiating reality contact, prospective presenters must be inserviced as to the goals and objectives of the program. Detailed pamphlets with instructions, and videotaped examples of model presentations are advisable. If the Saturday Alternative is to be a success, a great deal of planning, coordination and cooperation will be necessary. Failure to prepare adequately will diminish program effectiveness.

Contributions from business, industrial leaders, and other community professionals are limited only by the creativity of school officials and program participants. It must be remembered and emphasized the entire community will benefit both in the short and long term from positive student behavior. Although the program has been termed the Saturday Alternative, realistically the program might be conducted anytime.

Step four consists of completion of the Saturday Worksheet. Following the presentation students must deal with the reasons they were referred to the Saturday Alternative. A battery of questions are completed to initiate student thought processes, and provide counselors and support personnel

with helpful data. These open-ended questions ask the student to speculate on how problem behavior would be handled in business, industry or by other professions. Each student is also asked to indicate where he/she expects to be occupationally in five years, and lists the steps that must be taken to meet such expectations.

In Step five students complete the Saturday Behavioral Contract. Clarification of questions focusing upon how problem behavior affects other students, teachers, the school, and the individual student are asked. Students are required to write a contract which is designed to list how they plan to modify their behavior. Students and parents are provided information on both the ramifications of problem behavior and discipline steps school officials will take should the problem behavior fail to be corrected. Student data should be disseminated to all affected school personnel. This will provide teachers with information to more effectively deal with the student.

Counseling and support is the sixth step. Any behavioral modification will be short-lived without follow-up counseling or contact with the student. During the week following the Saturday Alternative a counselor or a support person of the student's choosing is assigned to the student. Forms the student completed at Saturday School are reviewed. The student's academic progress and behavior are monitored through a feedback instrument taken to teachers for signature each Friday. This keeps emphasis and pressure on the student and affords counselors and support persons the opportunity to provide reinforcement based upon student progress. This form is forwarded to parents for signature. The major purpose of counseling and support is to provide the student with security, build a positive self-concept and establish a school contact where the student can discuss problems.

Step seven is Operation Success. Implementation of this step is critical if student behavior is to be modified. As mentioned earlier, generally there are reasons for student misbehavior. It must be noted that many student problems in the classroom are aggravated by teachers. Often this is due to escalating a conflict, handling a situation in a destructive rather than a constructive fashion, or providing the student with little incentive to work in class. It must be remembered and re-emphasized that individuals respond more to success than failure. Teachers must create situations where students can experience success. Note this cycle is not advocating

social promotions or a reduction in academic standards, but instead creating instructional design strategies where students can be successful. Instructional strategies that address diverse student learning must be implemented. Considerable inservice and, in some cases, a new attitude toward teaching/learning must prevail. This is where administrators must become instructional leaders and provide teachers with assistance.

Step eight is reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is something that can not be overlooked. Many students who experience constant behavioral problems lack parental support. The Saturday Alternative provides students with needed positive support they may not receive elsewhere. Students who uphold the behavioral contract should receive recognition. This might be in the form of a certificate, a brief field experience at the end of a marking period or semester or another type of reinforcement. Initially some students may not respond positively to reinforcement since this might be something new and conflicting to peer group norms. Recognition for positive changes in student behavior is an important component of the Saturday Alternative.

The final step of the Saturday Alternative, Step nine, is Program Evaluation. All aspects of the Saturday Alternative must be evaluated and modified, if needed. The program must be consistently monitored and modified based on evaluation of how well it is meeting student and school needs.

Inservice is a major activity in the implementation of the Saturday Alternative. The need to inservice business and community leaders involved in the reality contact phase has been discussed. Inservicing teachers and administrators in designing activities that will lead to student success must be conducted. Saturday supervisors, counselors and support counselors must be instructed in desired program procedures. A major aspect of the program is helping parents become more effective in dealing with their student. Most parents want to do what is right, but often do not possess the skills to deal effectively with their student. Parenting classes focusing upon needs can be held on a regular basis.

The Saturday Alternative may not be the solution for all school systems; however, possibilities exist to solve many of the problems school systems face each day. The Saturday Alternative is an attempt to treat the causes of student misbehavior through first creating a data base on student

misbehavior and finally providing the student with a support system to both monitor and correct problem behavior. Implementation of such a program may come in many different forms, and the unique needs of the local school system will dictate the Saturday curriculum. Building a school disciplinary policy around the Saturday Alternative concept has the greatest chance to result in lasting behavioral improvement. The Saturday Alternative provides teachers, administrators and community leaders the time and mechanism at a relatively low cost to resolve many student-related problems.

FIGURE 1- THE SATURDAY ALTERNATIVE CYCLE